

MODULE 17

AGENDA

- I. Welcome
- II. “The Joy Luck Club”
- III. The First Day of Placement: “White Oleander”
- IV. The Placement Continuum
- V. The Suitcase Story
- VI. Managing the Change



PLACEMENT

The First Day....

The first day of placement will always be an exciting experience. In order for things to go well, advanced planning and preparation is important. You may wish to add additional helpful hints to this handout, and share it during a family meeting, so that the whole family is prepared to welcome the child or children.

When the child is initially placed in your home, he/she will not become comfortable with you and the new surroundings immediately. Even infants may experience a period of adjustment when placed in an unfamiliar environment. A child's reaction to placement depends largely upon past experiences. The fact that your home provides a safer and more nurturing environment, will not prevent this natural human process. An important point to remember is that the child's transition into your home will be made easier if you do not take the behavior personally.

Additional points to remember when a child is *initially* placed into your home:

- ☐ Be patient; don't expect miracles.
- ☐ The child is attempting to make some sense of new people, new surroundings, and behaviors that are different from what he/she is accustomed.
- ☐ No matter how terrible the previous situation was, the child will probably display some sadness and anxiety due to loss.
- ☐ The child may be unclean and poorly dressed with little, if any, clothing, or the child may be appropriately dressed with an adequate wardrobe. No matter what the child's condition, do not immediately discard his/her clothing and other personal possessions. They have special meaning to the child.
- ☐ The child may blame himself or herself for what has happened. Assure the child that this is not the case.
- ☐ The child may be withdrawn, tearful, anxious, angry, or overly active and playful. With some children, there will be no obvious effects of the placement.
- ☐ No matter what the child's behavior or disposition, it is important that you and your family show acceptance, warmth, and, most of all, understanding during this very difficult time for the child.

The Placement Continuum



Initial Placement_____

Honeymoon Period_____

Supervised Visitation_____

Sibling Visitation_____

Unsupervised Visitation_____

Home Visits_____

Disrupted Placement_____

Therapeutic Appointments_____

Court_____

Case Reviews_____

Permanency_____

The Suitcase Story: A Therapeutic Technique

Written for Children in Out of Home Placement”
by Carmela Wenger, M.A.

Once upon a time there was a suitcase. It had been so many places that it was covered with stickers. Imagine a suitcase covered with stickers! There were so many address labels on the suitcase that it wasn't sure which label was the right destination. This made the suitcase very scared because it thought that it might get lost. The suitcase remembered that once it had been brown with brass trim around its lid. When it looked in the mirror it could tell that it still looked like that. The problem was that more and more this suitcase was collecting address labels and stickers. After a while, the suitcase figured all of its brown leather would be covered. Then it would forget what color it used to be. This bothered the suitcase. Another thing that was bothersome was the people who carried it around. Sometimes they left the suitcase in the rain. This wasn't done on purpose. The day would be clear and sunny when it was left. Later, clouds would gather, and rain would start. The person who left the suitcase would come back and dry the suitcase off, but it took a long time to really dry and its brass trim would start to rust.

Another problem was that someone put it down really hard once, and it hurt. Once a lady tore off an old address label, to put on a new one. She tore it off so fast that it hurt too. Then she stuck the new one on top of the old glue without cleaning off the old glue. Because she hadn't cleaned off the old glue, the new label didn't stick. One day the suitcase got really mad and decided to get even. It waited until it was all packed and closed. Then, as the lady was carrying it, the suitcase opened up. All of the lady's baggage fell out. Boy, was she mad! It took her a long time to repack everything. And then, the suitcase just fell open again.



For a while, the suitcase was glad it had gotten even. It thought of more ways to make trouble. It planned ways to make its handle fall off, and waited to make sure that it would fall on someone's toes. After a while people did not trust the suitcase. They tied it together with a rope so it couldn't fall open. The rope didn't feel good; it made the suitcase madder. With the rope tied around it, no one could see its brass trim.

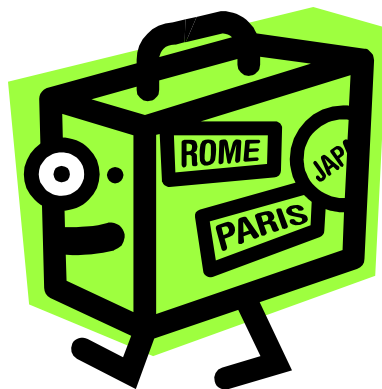
Time passed and the suitcase moved some more. Every time it fell on toes or let all of its baggage fall out, its owner would sell the suitcase. It got more stickers and labels. It also got some scratches and dents. The suitcase couldn't remember when it was new.

The Suitcase Story: A Therapeutic Technique

(Continued)

Finally, the unusual happened. A person named Jean bought the suitcase. The old owner said to Jean, "Watch out for this suitcase, because the handle falls off and the latch flies open." This made Jean look very closely at the suitcase. "No wonder it suddenly opens," she said. "People expect it to hold too much. I won't put so much inside." The suitcase could hardly believe it. Jean put inside the suitcase only what it could easily hold. When she knew it was too full, she carried it in her arms instead of tying it together with rope. The suitcase stayed closed, and its handle stayed on. Jean and the suitcase got used to each other. One day Jean said, "there are so many address labels on it, that someone might not know it's mine." Jean took off all of the old ones; only she did it very carefully. Then she polished the brass trim. For the first time in a very long time the suitcase looked in the mirror and smiled. "I look O.K.," it thought.

One day Jean said, "I wish this suitcase could talk. It's been so many places. I bet it has had some interesting adventures. "Some adventures!" thought suitcase. "I've been dropped, left out in the rain, lost, rusted, dented, and scratched." When the suitcase remembered, it wanted to yell, scream, and kick. It carried on for a while too. Then, the mad went away, and soon the sadness went away too.



Wenger, C. (1982). The suitcase story: A therapeutic technique for children in out-of-home placement. Reprinted from the American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, April 1982 pgs. 353-355.

Managing the Impact: Holding a Family Meeting

- ✓ Family meetings are organized family discussions with the goals of:
 - Discussing information;
 - Clarifying information to reduce confusion or doubt;
 - Problem-solving; and,
 - Strengthening the family system and relationships.
- ✓ If there are children in the immediate family, here are some suggested topics of discussion:
 - Sharing space and things;
 - Sharing parents with the new child;
 - Communicating with friends and neighbors;
 - Feelings about having a foster/adoptive sibling; and,
 - Best/worst thing they can think of regarding resource parenting.
- ✓ Use the "Go Around" method. Go around the circle, giving each family member the opportunity to respond to the topic.
- ✓ Allow for open discussion about any problems or concerns.
- ✓ Discuss what information about the child you will, and will not, be able to share with the family.
- ✓ Discuss what you have learned about the grieving process, discipline, contacts by the agency, your role on the child welfare team, and agency supports. Additionally, define the difference between foster care and adoption.
- ✓ Listen for and acknowledge the feelings that are expressed. Ask open-ended questions to clarify the concern, and then brainstorm solutions with the entire family.
- ✓ Identify and resolve conflicts.
- ✓ Plan for the child's entrance into the family.
- ✓ Share the placement continuum information with the family.
- ✓ Offer praise, encouragement, and thanks for the family's support.



Soothing Those Jangled Nerves: Stress Management

BACKGROUND

The housework is not done Mary needs her physical therapy, dinner is not started, and “what do you mean, my car is not ready yet?!” Everyday life provides us with a combination of happiness, pride, personal fulfillment, and strength; while sometimes simultaneously creating frustration, sorrow, feelings of inadequacy, and pain. Life is complicated and ever changing. Change, by itself, creates stress. Whether we embrace the change or not, we will feel the ramifications of stress. Given the constant changing demands in our daily lives, this becomes a major source of stress that is encountered.

WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress is the body’s response to a threatening condition. When confronted with stress, the mind tells the body that there is imminent danger, and it must fight or flee. This “fight or flight” response is an instinctual process to help insure the survival of the species. In modern society, the stressful event may be a public speech or a deadline, rather than a killer yak, but our body responds as if it were in danger of being destroyed.



Stress causes our muscles to tighten, our breathing becomes more rapid, blood flows more quickly to spread the increased oxygen throughout the body, nausea may set in, and thinking becomes confused. Once the stress is alleviated, our body is in a weakened state as it recovers from the adrenaline surge. Unremitting stress can impair the immune system, making it less able to resist the viruses that cause disease, and can lead to a constant sense of exhaustion and loss of energy.

For family caregivers, the stress of parenting a child in care often causes physical and emotional symptoms that need to be addressed.

SYMPTOMS OF STRESS

Stress can manifest itself in a variety of ways. It is easily confused with symptoms of other problems. If not managed properly, stress may cause problems that can reduce our overall ability to function effectively. Some common symptoms of stress include those mentioned above, as well as the following:

- Frequent headaches
- Fatigue
- Constipation, diarrhea, or problems with urination
- Increased use of alcohol, food, or drugs
- Withdrawal from family/friends
- Difficulty/ inability to concentrate
- Irritability, hostility
- Feelings of nervousness or anxiety
- Feelings of inadequacy

Soothing Those Jangled Nerves: Stress Management

MYTHS ABOUT STRESS

1. **Stress is the same for everyone.** Stress is different for each of us. What is stressful for one person may or may not be stressful for another.
2. **Stress is always bad for you.** Stress can overwhelm you, or it can add years to your life. The determining factor is how well stress is managed. If effectively managed, stress can have the opposite effect.
3. **Stress is everywhere and is unavoidable.** This is a negative outlook. Try to take control of your life, and plan so that stress does not overwhelm you. Learning to delegate, prioritize, and plan can help you manage stress. As a wise person once said, “managing stress is like weeding your garden; you can never get rid of the weeds completely, but you can keep them under control.”

STRATEGIES

Stress management is the way we respond and react to the everyday pressures and demands of life. Developing effective stress management skills are crucial.



Get enough rest and sleep. Although everyone does not have the same requirements for rest and sleep, the majority of us need at least seven or eight per night. Try to develop a regular sleep schedule. Go to bed and get up at the same time everyday. Avoid alcohol, caffeine, nicotine, stimulating activity and/or exercise prior to bed time. You may also want to develop a bedtime routine, like showering, soaking in a warm tub, reading, or listening to soft music prior to falling asleep.

Breathing. Deep breathing, when done properly, will relax the body even as it confronts high levels of stress or panic. It is physically impossible for muscles to remain tense when deep, relaxing breaths are taken. When you feel the tension mounting, stop, close your eyes, and take a few long, deep breaths. Be sure to breath through your diaphragm and not your chest. Feel the breath coming in through your nose and into your belly (your belly will actually rise), and allow the breath to expel through your mouth as your belly contracts. This pause only lasts a minute or two, but can clear your mind and allow you to refocus your energy on the task at hand.

Balance work and recreation. Take time out for yourself, and do something you enjoy. Consider scheduling a break into your busy day. Schedule five or ten minutes when you will stop working, and do something you enjoy. Some popular choices: working on a crossword puzzle, walking around the house or building where you work, stepping outside for a breath of fresh air, singing, calling a friend to schedule a lunch date, or staring out the window. Learning to integrate joyful moments into your daily life will go a long way towards alleviating and preventing stress.

Seek out support. Having a network of supportive friends and acquaintances is a vital resource in coping with stress. Sharing and confiding can buffer the stress connected with life's daily hassles. It is important to remember that you are not alone and that others can understand and empathize.

Soothing Those Jangled Nerves: Stress Management

Movement. Moving your body is an excellent way to dissipate stress. A formal exercise plan can be developed and followed, but a less formal approach will work equally well. Taking daily walks can be helpful in reducing stress and increasing your energy level. When you feel too tired to move, get up and dance, walk, or just jump in place. Doing so will increase the flow of blood through the body and to the brain and reinvigorate you for the tasks ahead.

Organize and manage time effectively. The three P's of effective time management that can assist you are as follows:

- *Prioritize* - Set goals for important things
- *Plan* - Schedule and set realistic time lines
- *Protect* - Learn to say no to unwanted demands and avoid time wasters

Learn to laugh! Laughter is truly medicine for the soul. Research has shown that laughter helps the body relax, enhances the immune system, and increases problem-solving abilities. Think about how good you feel after a hearty round of laughter; you are breathing more deeply, your face and neck are relaxed, and you feel happier. Make a special effort to look for humor and the lighter side of things. Learning to laugh at yourself, as well as with others, will go a long way to reducing stress.



SEEKING PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANCE

Stress is a fact of life that requires permanent life-style changes in order to manage. It is easier with practice, but you must be constantly aware of the symptoms and avoid slipping back into old habits. If you continue to have problems with stress you may want to seek professional help. When seeking help, find a caring, knowledgeable, non-judgmental person to assist you. Consider a psychologist, psychiatrist, doctor, minister, social worker, or counselor.

SUMMARY

Stress is a reality of modern society. Everyone confronts it, and everyone must know how they will live with it. For family caregivers, stress is often of a higher intensity and longer duration than for others, and diligence is required to manage it effectively. Recognizing the symptoms of stress will allow you to address the source before physical or emotional consequences become overwhelming. Learning to slow down, breath deeply, and see the humor in life will promote health and well-being.

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